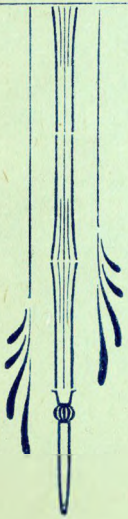
Service in Education



BY

D. RAJAGOPALACHARYA

SERVICE IN EDUCATION.

One of the saddest facts that has to be admitted about India is that now she is the most illiterate country in the civilised world. Even Russia, whose statistics of illiteracy, about 1880, coincided with those of India, has since advanced farther, leaving India without a parallel to-day. In the year 1910 the number per hundred of the whole population in different countries receiving elementary education was as follows:—

United States	21
Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and Switzerland	20
Norway, Netherlands, Germany and Austria-Hungary	17
France and Sweden	14
Denmark	13
Belgium	12
Japan	11
Italy, Greece and Spain	9
Indian States—	
Baroda	8.6
Travancore, Mysore and Cochin	6
Portugal and Russia	5
British India	1.9

Such was the relative progress achieved by most of the forward countries of the world. Baroda, nominally under the Viceroy of India, is in effect an independent State, managing its own internal affairs. Its enlightened and progressive ruler, the Gaekwar, has succeeded in taking big strides in educational enterprise. This State is peopled by Indians who have the same national ideals as those under English rule, but the citizens of Baroda are now far in advance of their less fortunate brethren in British India. It is a matter for deep concern that India, which forms so large a part of the British Empire, in territory and population, should rank last, the very last, in this list. Surely it is not an achievement of which Britain can be exactly proud!

A Glance at the Past.

While such is the unenviable position which India occupies to-day, what was her status a hundred years ago? One would naturally think, judging by the advance which other nations have made, that India must have been very much more backward in the matter of education than she is at the present time, for she cannot be an exception to the law of progress. It is true that in certain respects she has developed; she is producing men of great genius and ability,

poets, painters, scientists, and statesmen; but her development has been of an intensive character. She is no longer the prosperous country which she was two centuries ago, when living was easier and happier for her masses, when there were schools scattered broadcast to give instruction to everyone. Sir Thomas Munro, a high official of the East India Company, has recorded for us his testimony of these times. In giving evidence before the House of Commons, in 1813, referring to the civilisation of the Hindus, he said:—

> If a good system of agriculture, unrivalled manufacturing skill, a capacity to produce whatever can contribute to either convenience or luxury, *schools established in every village for teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic*, and general practice of hospitality and charity amongst each other, and, above all, a treatment of the female sex, full of confidence, respect and delicacy, are among the signs which denote a civilized people—then the Hindus are not inferior to the nations of Europe, and if civilisation is to become an article of trade between the two countries, I am convinced that this country (Britain) will gain by the import cargo.

And a year later in a dispatch of the East India Company it was stated that they were able to obtain Indian scribes and accountants, whose general intelligence was due to the schools, the "venerable and benevolent institutions."

Such, to say the least, was the satisfactory state of affairs one hundred

years ago. Who can tell what great and beneficial results might have accrued to India and to the world, if she had been enabled by her foreign rulers to continue her march of progress? But it is little use to speculate now on what might have been. The condition India is in now is only too well known; she presents a spectacle of poverty, suffering and illiteracy too terrible to describe. One of the vital causes of her degradation is the total disappearance of these "venerable and benevolent institutions," the village schools. They could no longer exist, when the support which had been their time-honoured privilege, was withdrawn by the new British Government. And so five generations of the masses have been denied their natural birthright, the opportunity for instruction. But fortunately, in spite of this harmful deficiency, the innate culture of the Indian villager has not left him. For "though not 'literate' in the modern sense, he is by no means in the dense state of ignorance which 'illiteracy' is now supposed to connote. There is a gentle wisdom which grows out of the dutiful labours of the household, the tilling of the soil, the necessary observation of the processes of nature, which lifts the village agriculturalist far above the level of the dweller in a narrow bye-way of a crowded city." (Mrs. Annie Besant).

Apathy of the Government.

Hitherto *comparatively* little has been done by the Government to give the necessary impetus to the spread of education. Not only have they shown little anxiety for the educational welfare of the *masses,* but they have persistently foiled the attempts of patriotic Indians to change the conditions. Mr. G. K. Gokhale's Bill of 1911, for Compulsory Primary Education, was defeated by the Government *bloc* in the Imperial Legislative Council, on the plea that the money needed to enforce that measure could not be raised. Mr. Gokhale pointed out how the money *could* be raised, but the new taxation would have interfered with the profits of the British merchants, and hence his bill was thrown out. In Australia the expenditure on education per head of the population is 11/3, while in India it is the grand sum of *one penny.* Comment is unnecessary.

National Revival in Education.

We Indians have realised that it is a colossal task to move the heavy mass of our Government to a better understanding of its responsibilities towards the Indian people. Some of us, tired of the existing conditions, have taken it into our own hands to effect improvements as far as possible. We are awake to the fine possibilities which India as a nation

has in the near future. Ours is not a race that is played out, for we have a mighty work to do in the world's reconstruction. We cannot afford to be slow in fitting ourselves for that glorious task.

The signs of this awakening are becoming increasingly evident every day. Movements are being organised to meet the pressing social and educational needs of the people. The National Educational Movement aims at the upliftment of the illiterate masses, by giving them, wherever possible, the chances of an elementary education. The experiment to re-establish village schools has been a striking success, and it has been my privilege to be one of the pioneers in this noble work. The special purpose of this article is to describe this educational activity which is being carried on in some of the villages round Madanapalle, a city near Madras. (Madanapalle, it may be of interest to know, is the birthplace of Mr. J. Krishnamurti, the Head of the Order of the Star in the East.) This activity was started by the students of a Theosophical College, established in this city by Mrs. Annie Besant.

How We Began.

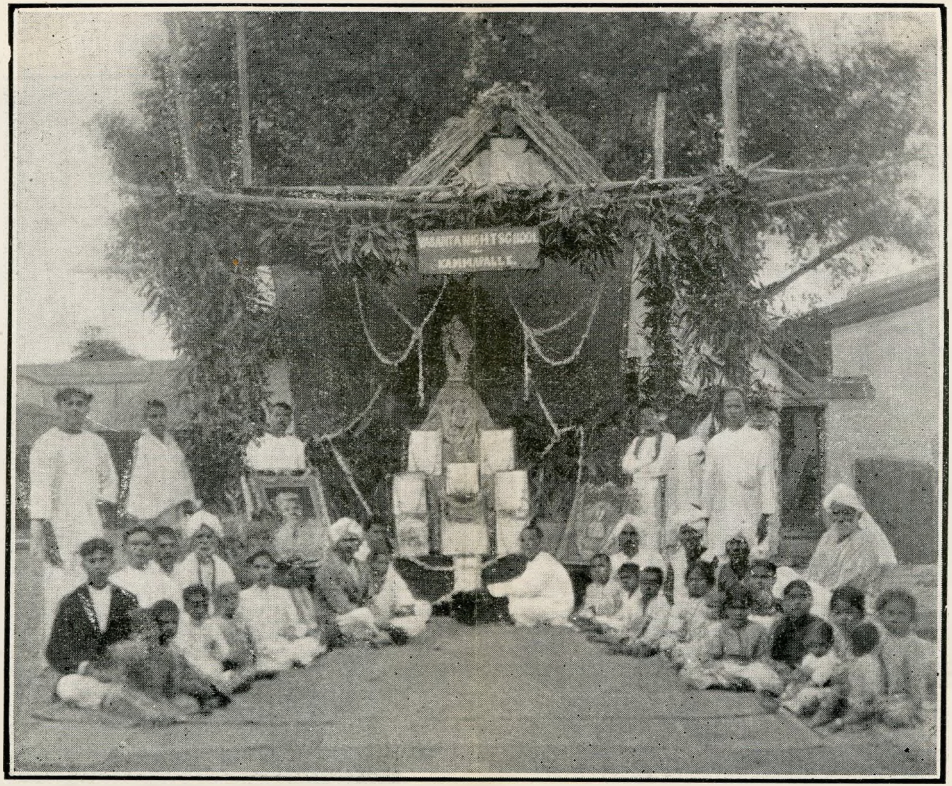
In the year 1916, a band of enthusiastic students occasionally visited a village called Pappireddipalle, situated half a mile to the west of our College

This we did late in the evenings, when we had finished our studies, and when the villagers were free from their day's labour and were at leisure to gather in the open to listen to our talks. It was our habit to sing for a while before beginning, in order to give the men and women time to assemble, and also to make them happy and interested in the meeting. Soon nearly the whole of the village population would arrive, eager to listen to whatever we had to say. Generally a good effect was produced in the minds of our rural audience, as we spoke to them on education, sanitation, and hygiene; as we told them stories of India's heroes of the past and present; as we drew their attention to the glory of their own religions, which were, we told them, often depreciated by missionaries only because the latter desired the people to join their own field. The villagers became increasingly interested in these matters, and their confidence in us grew. Often when we had finished our talks to them they would tell us all about themselves, their sufferings and their wants; how eager they were to get themselves and their children educated, but how poverty came in the way of their satisfying this need. We were much touched by these descriptions of their sorrows and troubles, and we promised to start a school in their village as soon as possible.

We requested them to repair an old hut, which was then being used by some of them as a cattle-shed, and convert it into a clean room. The owner of the hut was delighted to give us the free use of it. Six of us arranged to go to the village every evening and spend two hours in teaching what little we knew to these uneducated people. We were presented by some members of the College staff with a couple of blackboards and two kerosene oil lamps. We bought for the poor students some slates and books, and equipped the schoolroom with a few cheap mats and other necessaries. When the arrangements were complete, the first village night-school, named the Krishna Night School, to be conducted as a labour of love by students of the College, was opened in Pappireddipalle, on the 14th of November, 1916. There was a simple but impressive ceremony, in which many of the students and teachers of the College took part. Since that time the work of the school has been carried on with strict regularity.

The villagers took a real interest in the welfare of their school, and greatly helped rapidly to increase its strength. The little hut became insufficient to afford accommodation to the increasing number of students. We desired to construct a building, and, though land was readily available, a considerable sum of

Raja Night School, Chipli.



"WORSHIP OF SHIVA."

Vasanta (Besant) Night School at a Village close to the City of Madanapalle.
(This thatched hut to be built in brick when funds are available.)

Teaching Geography. The New Style in a National School. Building a Harbour. Note breakwater lights, boat, railway trains, goods sheds, etc

money had to be collected for the purpose. We opened a subscription list, and we wrote to various people telling them of the work we had been doing, and requesting them to help us with money to raise a good school building. Our appeal was not in vain; many persons donated substantial amounts, and with the money in hand we set to work, and had built for us a neat and commodious building. It was opened by Mr. C. Jinarajadasa, and at the opening ceremony the village students acted a Telugu drama, and though it was their very first attempt at acting, it was greatly appreciated by those present.

Record of Work.

In December, 1917, Mrs. Besant visited the school, and the report presented to her says:—

Pappireddipalle has 175 inhabitants, and 84 children of school-going age. There are in the school 65 students, of whom 13 are adults, 11 are girls, and 41 are boys. Fifty-two children out of 84, and no compulsion, may surely be said to be satisfactory. The subjects taught are Religion, Telugu, Arithmetic, Civics, Kindergarten, English, Sewing, Drawing, and Drill. The boys play football in a field kindly lent by a gentleman of the village. There is a Sangam (club) for discussion, and a fair library. The building is lighted by a good Kitsen burner, so that the eyesight of the students may not suffer.

The building cost us nearly £200.

There is a big plot of ground at its back, and it will be converted into a school garden very soon. Inside the building pictures of Sri Krishna, Saraswati, Mrs. Besant, and various heroes of India decorate the walls. Coloured pictures of a number of animals and birds, maps of the Madras Presidency, India and the World, are also hung on the walls. We have provided the students with good mats on which to sit, so that they may protect themselves from the cold of the ground at nights. A few low desks are also supplied to them on which they can conveniently do their written work. For want of a person who is trained to play on the vina or the violin, and who is ready to devote himself every night to the teaching of the students, we have been obliged to buy a harmonium for the school, on which anyone can play with comparative ease.

It is rarely that an out-of-the-way place like Madanapalle is visited by a circus, or a dramatic company, and even if there comes such an opportunity to get a little amusement, the majority of the village population are too poor to take advantage of it. Considering how necessary it is for every hard-working human being to have a little recreation now and then, we have made arrangements to provide this for the villagers. We have secured for the use of the school a good

magic lantern and a number of slides, some being coloured, illustrating various simple stories, others being photographic reproductions of scenes in Japan, America, Ceylon and other countries. A few of these are shown to them at a time, and explained in Telugu. A gramophone has been presented to the school, and the villagers immensely enjoy hearing the songs.

Gradually reports of a well-worked village school, wherein education was given free to the students, spread to other villages in Madanapalle Taluk (District). In March, 1917, Kamapalle, a village very near the College, invited us to open a school for its people. More students of our College readily came forward and offered themselves to conduct it. The classes were for some time held under the branches of a banyan tree, as no other accommodation was available. This school worked regularly in spite of many difficulties, and finally a big hut was put up by us in the middle of the village. It is about 35 feet by 15 feet, and in parts the walls are of open-tiled structure for purposes of ventilation. The roof is nicely thatched and the floor is made even and is thinly sanded. Both sides of the walls are whitewashed. The hut is kept very clean, and is lighted by a Kitsen burner. A report of this, the Vasanta Night School, says:—

Kampalle has 45 houses, with 260 inhabitants. The school began with 22 pupils, and has now 55, being 13 adults, 11 girls, and 28 boys. There are six classes, one for adults, one for girls, and four for boys of different capacities. The teachers number seven, one of them the daughter of Mr. Giri Rao, the well-known headmaster of the Madanapalle School from its early days. She teaches the girls needlework, drawing, and *kolattam* (dancing). All the teachers but one are students. There is a library of 100 Telugu books. Devotional meetings are often held with singing.

Another school, known as the Raja Night School, has been educating the villagers at Chipli, a hamlet two miles to the west of the College. Distance has been no barrier to the youths who are doing this noble work. "Chipli," we read in the report, "contains 60 houses, with a population of 450, of whom 150 are children of school-going age. The school started on the 16th September, 1917, with 39 pupils, and now has 80, comprising 20 adults, 23 girls and 37 boys. There are nine classes—three for adults, four for boys, and two for girls. The teachers are enthusiastic, and the students eager to learn. The opening prayers are Hindu, Muhammadan and general, and the religious teaching is by stories." In all other respects the work in the Vasanta and Raja Night Schools is carried on along the same lines as those which I have already de-

scribed as adopted in the Krishna Night School.

The Triangle of Schools.

It will interest Theosophists to know that the three villages where are the Vasanta, Krishna and Raja schools, are so situated as to form the three points of a Triangle, and hence these schools were named after our President, Mrs. Annie Besant, Mr. J. Krishnamurti, and Mr. C. Jinarajadasa.

Four more schools have lately been started, two of which are for the labourers of the town of Madanapalle. Thus, Madanapalle has become a big centre of educational activities, and I hope the seeds of knowledge that are sown freely by these who love their younger kindred will take root so that the future crop may be for the glory and prosperity of India.

Our Next Dream.

Such is the splendid record of steady, unselfish service, which the youths of this Theosophical College have rendered. There is much that they hope to do in the coming years to further this useful work. Their immediate ambition is to construct a neat little building for the Vasanta Night School. The hut we see in the picture has served its time, and is fast approaching dilapidation.

Already a few friends in Australia and New Zealand have very generously contributed towards this proposed building, and I desire to thank them heartily for the great interest they have taken in our work. There may be many others who, having read my account, perhaps wish to aid us, and I need hardly add how welcome all such aid will be. More than mere sums of money, their sympathy and their eagerness to hold out a hand of assistance to a struggling nation will strengthen the bonds of alliance which exist between India and the other parts of our British Empire.

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NOTE BY C. JINARAJADASA.

I have personally seen the work of these night schools for the villagers round Madanapalle. The youth of India to-day, both boys and girls, respond keenly to all ideals of social service, and we, the elders in India, realise that such sacrifices as we make of time and money to encourage them in their work will be repaid a thousand-fold in adding to the nation's band of reformers, when these boys and girls grow into men and women. The Lord Buddha has said that the greatest of gifts is the Gift of Knowledge, and all who can help in the giving of such gifts to the ignorant masses will surely deserve well, both of man and God.

C. JINARAJADASA.

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